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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 10 July 1997, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. HENZE (Germany)
(Vice-President)

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GE.97-62835 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (agenda item 1) (continued)

Requests from non-governmental organizations for hearings (E/1997/80/Add.1 and 2)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to take a decision on the requests for hearings by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with consultative status whose names appeared in documents E/1997/80/Add.1 and 2. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Council agreed to hear those NGOs under the relevant agenda items.

It was so decided.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES:

(a) MAINSTREAMING THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE INTO ALL POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM (continued) (E/1997/66 and 94, E/1997/NGO/1)

Mr. von BECKH WIDMANSTETTER (Argentina) said that mainstreaming the gender perspective into programming met a need at the national and international levels. At the regional level, the programme of action endorsed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) as a complement to the medium-term plan for the period 1996/2001 reaffirmed the principle of gender equity as part of an integrated approach to development. At the United Nations level, in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action, all bodies should integrate the gender perspective into their policies and programmes, establish concrete mechanisms and indicators to measure progress achieved and include the necessary resources in their budgets. The Commission on the Status of Women had a fundamental role to play in supporting the other functional commissions and the Council, and the latter was responsible for evaluating the results achieved on an annual basis. That entire process required coordination and appropriate funding.

Ms. DOWDESWELL (Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)) said that women had a major role to play in environmentally sustainable development. Out of an awareness that women's role as guardians and preservers of the environment had been insufficiently recognized, UNEP had set two long-term goals: to ensure that women became full partners in environmental management and to incorporate their particular wisdom into

decision-making for environmental development. Based on those two goals, UNEP had made 10 specific commitments in accordance with the priorities for the advancement of women established at Beijing.

At the internal level, guidelines had been established to ensure that all projects met gender-sensitive criteria and that all UNEP meetings, forums and training activities provided an equal opportunity for women's participation. Recruitment policies had been adjusted to facilitate the hiring of women. The gender focal point for women was a member of the appointments and promotions board, and there were plans to develop a women's roster. Through the performance appraisal system, managers were held accountable for measures taken to implement gender criteria in recruitment and programme planning.

At the level of activities, UNEP encouraged women's participation at all levels of the preparation and implementation of the major conventions negotiated under its aegis. Environmental education and training programmes were centred on women's concerns. An environmental citizenship programme, carried out in cooperation with the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), Consumers International and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), would make it possible to reach women more systematically.

Stricter UNEP controls on chemicals that threatened the health of women and children were planned, and the Convention on Biological Diversity would promote the use of women's traditional knowledge. Those were only two examples of specific UNEP activities aimed at restoring women's proper role in environmental protection.

Mr. GRECU (Romania) said that mainstreaming the gender perspective should be carried out in close coordination with the follow-up to the Beijing Conference and other major United Nations conferences. The Council should provide specific guidance on that matter to its functional and regional commissions and make an annual assessment of their progress in discharging their responsibilities. It could also facilitate the integration of a gender perspective by United Nations entities which dealt with areas traditionally considered "gender-neutral", such as legal matters or political and security questions.

In Romania, democracy had given women new opportunities for wider participation in all aspects of society. Despite problems associated with the

transitional period, important measures had already been taken. In 1996, his Government had established a Department for the Advancement of Women in implementation of commitments made at Beijing. Various projects, chiefly dealing with social protection and targeting older, rural and unemployed women, had been undertaken. The National Plan on Women defined the Government's priorities. At the same time, the Government was working at the intersectoral level to incorporate a gender perspective into the formulation and implementation of all its policies and projects.

That national effort should be supported by international cooperation and assistance in areas such as communication technologies and statistical methodologies on gender-disaggregated data processing.

Romania highly valued its cooperation with the United Nations system and, in particular, the Division for the Advancement of Women. In September 1996, Bucharest had hosted a subregional conference on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to a substantive gender-related project carried out in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Romania, together with France, China and Chile, was participating in an International Labour Organization (ILO) pilot programme on the promotion of equal opportunities in labour administration. Last, the Department on Women was considering the possibility of setting up a national equal opportunity agency in cooperation with the European Union.

Ms. SOLEDAD ARGUETA (El Salvador) emphasized the important role of the Commission on the Status of Women for the implementation of recommendations on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all elements of the United Nations system. Encouraging results had already been achieved by United Nations activities in El Salvador through the creation of focal points for gender-related issues. However, in order to carry out their mission more effectively, those focal points needed increased resources and the help of support staff. There was also a need to make all staff members, at agency headquarters and in the country or regional offices, aware of the role of women and to strengthen mechanisms for internal monitoring to ensure that that role was given due consideration.

In implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, El Salvador had established a Salvadoran Institute for the Promotion of Women, which had

technical, financial and administrative autonomy. That Institute, which played a catalytic role, included the principal Ministers of State and the official responsible for the protection of human rights as members of its governing board. It was responsible for training and consciousness-raising involving State officials, particularly those responsible for the implementation of development programmes and projects. Barely a year after its establishment, the Institute, which worked in close cooperation with a broad range of national bodies and representatives of civil society, had developed a national policy on women for 1997-1999. An initial analysis had shown that 50 per cent of the planned activities had been, or were in the course of being, carried out.

Her Government hoped that the Council's work would lead to concrete recommendations through which the integration of a gender perspective would become a reality.

Ms. LI Sangu (China) said it was not easy to turn words into action. Taking the gender perspective into consideration would produce concrete results only if there was a clearly articulated political will, which she hoped would be strengthened at the Council's current session. In monitoring integration of the gender perspective, the Council and the functional commissions must work in close cooperation to avoid duplication and strengthen the complementarity of their work. Not only should progress towards that integration be maintained in the economic and social fields, efforts must also be made to introduce it into the so-called "gender-neutral" areas. Last, translation into action of follow-up to the major conferences, particularly the one held at Beijing, would require adequate budgetary resources from the various agencies.

Ms. ZHANG (International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that, in a world where flagrant inequalities between the sexes still existed, no development was gender-neutral. In the United Nations system, gender mainstreaming was primarily the responsibility of the senior management, who must be personally involved in implementing that strategy if it was to bear fruit and must be held responsible for taking concrete measures at the planning, programming, budgeting, implementation and evaluation stages. Not only practical measures, but also mentalities and attitudes, must be changed.

She hoped that when the Council met in 1998 to conduct its mid-term review of the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, the United Nations agencies would have more tangible results to present.

The gender focal-point units must be given the means to carry out their mandate, which was to facilitate, not to take sole responsibility for, gender mainstreaming. Their mission should be reflected in their job description and their performance appraised accordingly.

Last, the importance of inter-agency coordination could not be over-emphasized. At the headquarters level, she noted the achievements of the Commission on the Status of Women and, at the country level, that of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and UNDP. The Commission, the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and UNIFEM should cooperate more closely and work to further harmonize their strategies.

Ms. KORPI (Finland) said her delegation had been very impressed by the work done, and the results achieved, in mainstreaming the gender perspective into the United Nations system. However, she wondered whether Governments and organizations really understood the idea of mainstreaming and whether they all interpreted it in the same way. There had been much discussion of women's projects and the number of women in higher positions, but less had been said concerning policies to be followed and ways of mainstreaming a gender perspective into those policies. Under those conditions, she wondered how coordination problems could be tackled system-wide. Very interesting efforts had been made to strengthen the system's capacity to deal with that complex task at the theoretical level. Some programmes and organizations had achieved excellent results, but individual efforts were not enough: gender mainstreaming must be institutionalized. As had been often stated, the responsibility for mainstreaming lay at the highest levels of management. While the agencies specializing in gender issues had an important role to play in that regard, Governments also bore a large share of the responsibility.

With regard to accountability, her delegation emphasized the need for methods, tools and indicators which would make possible a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of measures taken and results achieved. The

Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality, the Bretton Woods institutions, research centres and Governments had much to accomplish in that area.

Mr. PARSHINKOV (Russian Federation) said that while he approved of the initial measures taken by most of the intergovernmental bodies and United Nations agencies to integrate gender mainstreaming into their policies, he had the impression that there was not yet a common interpretation of mainstreaming. The tendency towards excessive theorizing and the use of a language which was clear only to the initiated had doubtless contributed to that situation. Basically, the idea was that the United Nations should continually bear in mind the goal of equality between men and women in the planning, implementation and evaluation of its activities. That simply meant that, in each case, it was important to establish exactly who would be responsible for including the gender perspective in project agendas, who would be responsible for implementing that programme and who would be accountable for the results of its implementation.

The Secretary-General had set an example by appointing a woman to the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights. If the heads of all the agencies, rather than making more and more recommendations, would follow that example by taking concrete measures to implement the resolutions which had already been adopted, considerably more progress would be made towards achieving the goal which had been set.

It was, of course, important to pursue a theoretical study of the gender perspective, but only from a practical point of view and bearing in mind basic realities and past experience. For example, lessons could be learned from the important work which had already been done by the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Equality Between Women and Men. Last, he emphasized the need for close cooperation with NGOs, particularly women's organizations.

Ms. BRANDSTRUP (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)) said that her organization was continuing to mainstream gender into its work. All 24 FAO technical divisions had participated in the development of the Women in Development/Gender Programmes of Action, 1996-2001. Those programmes, which were the basis for the FAO Plan of Action for Women in Development, included achievable targets, strategies for implementation and monitoring indicators.

An interdepartmental committee on women in development had been established in February 1996 to provide policy guidance and facilitate coordination and decision-making on substantive and operational matters related to women in development. In addition, FAO had developed diagnostic and methodological tools and training in order to increase the capacity of its staff to implement policies for the participation of women in development. Since 1993, FAO and others, including ILO and UNDP, had been developing a Socio-economic and Gender Analysis Programme, which was designed to give development professionals the necessary tools to mainstream gender and other socio-economic concerns. Those methods and tools were being systematically presented and explained to staff members.

Last, the World Food Summit had given FAO the opportunity to highlight the importance of women, particularly rural women, with regard to food security.

Ms. BARBERO-BACONNIER (International Organization for Migration (IOM)), noting that women were increasingly subject to migration and particularly vulnerable to the problems associated with it, said it was essential for their specific needs to be taken into consideration from the moment that they decided to migrate until their return home. A number of IOM projects throughout the world had shown that that approach could, in fact, assist and empower migrant women.

Women migrant workers and victims of the traffic in women were two groups which were particularly vulnerable to violence. Prevention and assistance constituted the twofold IOM policy in addressing the traffic in women. Trafficking in migrant women was an issue of extreme urgency. A global seminar on that topic, organized by IOM in 1994, had led to a number of in-depth studies carried out from the sending, transit and receiving country perspectives. One such study had explored the traffic in Philippine women for sexual exploitation in Japan, while earlier studies had focused on Eastern, Central and Western European countries. All those reports had alerted policy-makers to the parameters of the problem and had made concrete recommendations.

Furthermore, IOM was facilitating the return and reintegration of women, particularly Vietnamese and Cambodian, who were victims of the traffic to Thailand and had provided reintegration assistance to nearly 600 Vietnamese

who had returned from China and was finalizing information campaigns in Asia to alert potential migrants to the dangers of trafficking. In South America, it was carrying out activities to empower migrant women to overcome the social and economic barriers which they faced. The mainstreaming of migrant women's reproductive health needs was fundamental. The International Centre for Migration and Health, established in Bosnia under the auspices of IOM and the University of Geneva, had carried out a post-conflict pregnancy outcome study which it hoped could be adapted to the situation in other countries, particularly Angola. In addition, IOM was working to ensure that migrant women could participate as fully as men in its projects and services. An upcoming training course in Bulgaria would be aimed at ensuring a gender balance among migration officials and border guards.

Mainstreaming also meant addressing the internal gender balance policies of international organizations. Women remained under-represented in IOM decision-making positions, despite the organization's policy on equal opportunity and treatment, and IOM had developed a plan of action to correct that imbalance.

Mr. HUSSEIN (Observer for Kenya) said the United Nations had an important role to play in developing and implementing a comprehensive policy programme for mainstreaming the gender perspective into all its activities and assisting Member States to do the same with their development programmes. His delegation called on the Council to recommend to the General Assembly that all its main committees and subsidiary bodies should systematically mainstream the gender perspective into all areas of their work, not only in the economic and social sectors but also into programmes on human rights, humanitarian assistance, disarmament, peace and security, and legal and political matters. His delegation considered it necessary to strengthen the central role of the Commission on the Status of Women and concurred with the recommendation that the Commission should provide input or suggestions to other functional commissions in areas where they might require support and guidance on how to introduce a gender perspective into their work.

His Government was continuing to ensure that women participated in, and benefited equally from, the development process. It was also working to reverse the decline in enrolment and graduation rates, particularly for girls,

and to improve the quality of education at all levels, and was preparing a gender sensitization programme for teachers and education officials in order to promote the education of girls.

Given the increasingly important role of women in the rural sector, his Government had taken measures to redesign extension services to provide rural women with directly relevant and accessible information. It also planned to ensure that women in the small and medium-sized enterprise sectors had access to skill-upgrading training tailored to their specific needs.

The United Nations regional commissions and other subregional structures could play a significant role in helping national institutions to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. The Council should consider reviewing the capacity of the regional commissions in order to strengthen gender mainstreaming into their activities and allow them to help countries to do the same. His delegation recommended that adequate resources should be allocated to women-specific programmes to eliminate poverty. Last, he urged all participants to renew their commitment to implementing the objectives agreed upon in the Beijing Platform for Action and to endeavour to ensure that the current debate led to results which would benefit women throughout the world.

Ms. WAHAB (Observer for Indonesia) said that in order for the United Nations to remain in the vanguard of the struggle for equality, mainstreaming of the gender perspective into all the programmes and policies of its bodies must be made more visible. The drafting by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) of a mission statement for the United Nations system on the advancement and empowerment of women and gender mainstreaming should contribute to incorporating women's concerns into the work of the system. As the Secretary-General had recommended, the Second Committee should apply a gender perspective in its consideration of economic questions, particularly with regard to property alleviation - since 70 per cent of those living in absolute poverty were women - and by the Fifth Committee in order to ensure that adequate human and financial resources were devoted to gender mainstreaming. In order to avoid duplication, her delegation supported the Secretary-General's recommendation that INSTRAW and UNIFEM should submit their annual reports to the Commission on the Status of Women. The role of the Resident Coordinators in developing a coherent approach should be strengthened. Gender mainstreaming, at Headquarters and in the field, would

require better data collection, gender analysis and gender expertise. The Women's Indicators and Statistics database (WISTAT) should be further developed, and follow-up to programmes for women should be streamlined, transparent and pragmatic. While important progress had been made, it was important to build on the lessons learned. As the Secretary-General had recommended, pilot projects should be conducted by various entities in order to assess the impact of mainstreaming on programme output. Memoranda of understanding on gender equality goals should be prepared and shared with a view to developing model agreements.

Ms. ENGELBRECHT (South Africa) said that the perception still persisted that certain technical areas or projects and abstract processes of policy and programme development were gender-neutral. In order to incorporate the gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system, it would be necessary to take concrete measures to set up mechanisms for evaluation of progress made and to report on that progress to the Commission on the Status of Women, the Council and the General Assembly. All United Nations staff, not merely gender experts, should receive basic gender training or improve their existing skills.

If gender mainstreaming was not to remain an ideal, gender concerns must be addressed in setting priorities, allocating resources and identifying types of intervention. Mainstreaming was still lacking in many areas of United Nations activity, notably with regard to legal matters, humanitarian assistance, economic issues and political and security issues such as peacekeeping and conflict resolution. South Africa supported the recommendation that the Council should review the capacity of the regional commissions to strengthen gender mainstreaming in their activities and to promote regional cooperation in that respect. The annual reports of INSTRAW and UNIFEM should be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women; UNIFEM had an important role to play in developing countries, and her delegation requested that its resources should be increased and that a training programme for developing countries should be set up.

Ms. KUPCHYNA (Belarus) said that very interesting ideas had been put forward during the dialogue at the Council's 20th meeting on mainstreaming the gender perspective into all United Nations programmes and policies. If genuine progress was to be made in that regard, it was essential that gender

should be taken into account at all levels and in all areas in developing plans and programmes and in project implementation and assessment. As the Secretary-General had recommended in his report, the General Assembly should direct all its main committees and subsidiary bodies to take gender factors into consideration in their work and the Council's functional commissions should adopt an explicit decision on mainstreaming a gender perspective in their work and indicate the necessary resources and modalities. The Commission on the Status of Women should act as a catalyst, particularly for all decisions concerning security, human rights and legal matters. Many essential aspects of gender mainstreaming had been mentioned by earlier speakers. She, in turn, emphasized the importance of constructive dialogue between the agencies of the United Nations system, national institutions for gender equity and women's NGOs.

Belarus had made it a priority to carry out the activities called for in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and its national plan included specific provisions for improving the status of women. She hoped that the agreed conclusions to be adopted by the Council would reflect some of the Secretary-General's recommendations.

Ms. PAVLIC (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that UNESCO had participated actively in the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality and that its basic approach to gender mainstreaming had been incorporated in the report of the Secretary-General. The work of UNESCO regarding women, girls and gender equality was guided by five resolutions which had been adopted at its General Conference in 1995, immediately after the Fourth World Conference on Women. There were 10 special projects which focused on areas defined in the Beijing Platform for Action. Furthermore, UNESCO had been working to develop gender-sensitive statistics and indicators in areas of its concern and to integrate gender guidelines in the evaluation of its programmes. Gender consciousness training would be provided for UNESCO staff at headquarters and in the field and for the national commissions for cooperation with UNESCO which existed in nearly all its member States. Those efforts should make it possible to achieve better coordination of actions within UNESCO and with its many partners. At the same time, measures were being taken to introduce accountability for mainstreaming.

Over the past few years, the number of women appointed or promoted to professional or high-level posts had increased from about 30 per cent as of 1 January 1990 to about 37 per cent as of 1 January 1997, and UNESCO hoped to improve those results over the next two years. The above-mentioned measures were expected to "de-ghettoize" the women and girls gender dimension of its work in the minds of both men and women, not only among the organization's staff but, even more importantly, among its partners at the country level. That approach would be tested in the preparation of two major international conferences, the World Conference on Higher Education, to be held in 1998, and the World Science Conference, to be held in 1999. Two events might have a significant impact on gender mainstreaming in areas of UNESCO competence: an international campaign to promote women's and girls' right to education as a fundamental human right, to be launched in 1998 in a select number of countries, and a debate on women's unpaid work, based on the report "Our Creative Diversity". Last, the Women and the Culture of Peace Programme explored gender-related factors that thwarted or enhanced the transition from the present "culture of violence" to a culture of peace.

Ms. ASHIPALA-MUSAVYI (Observer for Namibia) said that the Beijing Conference had recognized that the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women had had little effect, in part because gender issues had been considered in isolation. That situation remained virtually unchanged: at the national level, those questions were still considered as women's, rather than national or development, issues, while at the intergovernmental level they were considered as sectoral questions. For Namibia, the goal of mainstreaming the gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system was to help eliminate the "feminization of poverty" and its causes.

Her delegation considered that it was more important to strengthen national capacities for operational activities than to appoint women to high-level posts; women's concerns should be integrated into the Council's resolutions in various fields rather than being the subject of specific resolutions. As the African delegations had explained at length at the Beijing Conference, the gender unit of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) did not have the capacity to effectively coordinate gender mainstreaming. That capacity should be strengthened.

With regard to coordination between the Division for the Advancement of Women, INSTRAW and UNIFEM, she endorsed the statement made by the observer for Indonesia: UNIFEM had an important role to play in the empowerment of women, which was essential to their participation on an equal basis with men. That point should, therefore, be clearly made in the agreed conclusions. Gender sensitization was a requirement for all United Nations staff members. After the Beijing Conference, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), for its part, had established a gender equality unit responsible for coordination with the national mechanisms of member States. However, gender balance in the United Nations staff must not take precedence over the principle of equitable geographical distribution. Last, successfully integrated follow-up to major United Nations conferences could be measured only through success at the national level. It was therefore essential that countries should be provided with the resources necessary to that end.

Ms. HERNANDEZ QUESADA (Cuba) said there could be no social, political or economic progress without the elimination, in individual societies and at the international level, of the stereotypes which limited women's participation and equality. While the statistics seemed to suggest a higher level of women's participation, the ideas which had marginalized them for centuries remained. Her delegation attached great importance to the integration of a gender perspective and was therefore following closely the negotiations leading to the Council's agreed conclusions in that regard. While she welcomed the report of the Secretary-General, she thought that it focused too closely on the establishment of general principles and tended to ignore the need to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. With regard to the recruitment of women, she concurred with the representatives who had emphasized the importance of Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations; gender equality was simply an addition to the other principle on which recruitment of United Nations staff should be based, particularly that of the widest possible geographical distribution. She hoped that that criterion would be reaffirmed during the current reform process. Improvement in the living conditions of society as a whole, and therefore of women, was a constant concern of the Cuban Government and people. Despite the difficult conditions resulting from the blockade which had been imposed on Cuba for over 38 years, there had been considerable improvement in the condition of women

there. Over 40 per cent of Cuban workers were women, and they were widely represented in the technical, service, management, education and health sectors. Many of the world's inhabitants were still subject to the daily scourge of poverty. Of the 1.3 billion people living in extreme poverty, 70 per cent were women and girls. That was a disaster which could only be aggravated by neo-liberal prescriptions, and the number of women who had no job, home or right to a decent life was bound to increase. She was struck by the fact that the word "poverty" appeared only once in the draft agreed conclusions, although the Secretary-General's report mentioned the adoption of a gender perspective in the struggle against poverty.

Ms. GUTIERREZ (Observer for the Dominican Republic) said that mainstreaming the gender perspective into all programmes and policies of the United Nations system should seek not only to increase women's participation and training and ensure the equitable distribution of resources, but also to encourage their participation at all levels of decision-making and in programmes and policies devoted to the elimination of poverty worldwide or to the promotion of peace. It was also important to set up a system of evaluation and ongoing monitoring which would make it possible to assess progress in gender mainstreaming.

In that regard, cooperation with NGOs was essential; they must participate more actively in the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, particularly when it considered follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women. It was also important to strengthen coordination between the various United Nations bodies at the local and regional levels. To that end, the institutional resources of INSTRAW should be increased.

The Secretary-General had recommended that INSTRAW and UNIFEM should report to the Commission on the Status of Women, but it would doubtless be better to reflect further on that idea in view of the upcoming reforms to the United Nations system. However, it would be useful to know what INSTRAW and UNIFEM thought of the idea.

Mr. PERERA (Sri Lanka) said that the Secretary-General's report provided firm guidance for Governments and the United Nations system with regard to gender mainstreaming. Sri Lanka was currently implementing a national plan for the promotion of women which had been established in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women. The Ministry concerned

had set up a series of contact groups which monitored actions undertaken and budgetary allocations. The performance indicators which the United Nations was progressively establishing were certainly very useful.

Mr. ALVAREZ (Observer for Costa Rica) said the Council had received valuable information on progress towards gender equality made by the various programmes and specialized agencies in their respective domains. Considerable progress had also been made in Costa Rica, which had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1984 and, in 1990, had adopted an act aimed at promoting gender equality at the social level. Gender equality in access to education had already been achieved, and there had been clear progress in women's participation in the economic sector. Efforts were currently under way to prepare women for more frequent appointment to senior positions at all levels of administration and corporate management and to provide them with training so that they could participate more actively in all the macroeconomic sectors. In that regard, the General Assembly should recommend additional activities for the promotion of women.

Ms. WILTSHIRE (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that UNDP faced three major challenges in successfully mainstreaming the gender perspective into its policies and programmes.

The first involved establishing partnerships with NGOs and the private sector. The NGOs had, in fact, become extremely competent in gender-related matters. The official UNDP partners were still Governments, and women remained a small minority at the formal decision-making tables. While most Governments were strengthening their partnerships with NGOs and civil society, the UNDP legal system prevented it from doing so. Adjustments had been made at the policy level in order to facilitate that process, but the legal and financial changes had taken far longer than anticipated. It had also been necessary to build capacity in participatory processes, both institutionally and at the national level. Moreover, the entire United Nations system must include civil society and specialized NGOs in its deliberations to a far greater extent than at present.

Globalization had also led UNDP to focus more closely on the private sector, with which it must work to eliminate poverty and empower women. Women leaders already played a role in the private sector and headed many major companies in both North and South.

The second challenge for UNDP was to move from situations of war and crisis to sustainable human development. In the course of its operational activities, UNDP had noted that women often played a pivotal role in the reconstruction and development of countries after a crisis; efforts must therefore be made to include them in negotiations and to take their priorities into account. That would require gender competence on the part of United Nations leadership and the various agencies, and the opportunity provided by changes at the national and global levels must not be lost.

The third challenge to UNDP was the need for budgetary allocations which provided explicitly for gender mainstreaming and for the establishment of mechanisms to monitor expenditures and outcomes.

Ms. HUSKINS (American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)) said she wished to speak on behalf of AARP and the Geneva NGO Committee on the Status of Women, which included some 50 NGOs in consultative status with the Council.

With regard to the promotion of women, in order to move from mere analysis of the problems to action resulting in real change, several areas must be given priority attention.

First, coordination, which was currently inadequate, must be strengthened. Several different functional commissions were responsible for follow-up to the various world conferences, whereas that follow-up should be integrated and go hand in hand with an integrated gender mainstreaming policy. Every opportunity for coordination of mainstreaming must be seized; in that regard, AARP noted that the Secretary-General had recommended in his report that the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission for Social Development should harmonize efforts on behalf of older women in connection with the International Year of Older Persons (1999).

Second, with regard to accountability and targets, the Secretary-General was right in seeking to shift responsibility for implementation to the highest levels of decision-making in the United Nations system.

Third, with regard to capacity-building and cooperation with NGOs, it was encouraging that the Secretary-General had recommended that all staff members should be required to have training in basic gender competence and to be accountable for mainstreaming gender in their assignments. Those were areas where NGOs had acquired significant and successful experience, and they should be given the opportunity to share examples of best practices, as well as lessons learned from less successful efforts, with the United Nations system.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.